

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#379

KANAME HARADA

A6M2 FIGHTER PILOT, JAPANESE SHIP *SORYU*, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON

DECEMBER 5, 2001

BY BOB CHENOWETH AND COMMANDER BILL SCULLION

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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Interpreter , Paul Cobbett (I): (Speaking in Japanese)...and that introduction, does that just go straight onto the file? It doesn't need interpreting?

Bob Chenoweth (BC): Right. And then I'll ask—I have six questions to ask.

(Speaking in Japanese)

I: Just a moment, I'm going to put in my hearing aid, okay?

BC: Excellent.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

BC: The following oral history interview was conducted by Bob Chenoweth from the National Park Service and [*Commander*] Bill Scullion, United States Navy, for the USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, on December 5, [2001]. The person being interviewed is Harada Kaname, who was an A6M2 fighter pilot from the aircraft carrier *Soryu* on December 7, 1941. For the record, please state your full name, place of birth and date of birth.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

Kaname Harada (KH): (Speaking in Japanese)

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: My name is Harada Kaname. I was born in Japan, Nagano prefecture, Nagano City, Asakawa Nishijyo 472. I am now eighty-five years old, having been born in the year Taisho 5, 1916, August 11.

BC: What did you consider your hometown in 1941?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: It was the same as today, Nagano City, Asakawa Nishijyo 472.

BC: What were your parents' names?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Mi-sa?

KH: O.

I: O. My father's name was Harada, Seiichi. My mother's name was Harada, Misao.

BC: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: There were three of us siblings. I was the first and I had one younger brother and one younger sister.

BC: Where did you go to high school?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I went to the Nagano Prefectural Middle School.

BC: Where and why did you enlist in the Imperial Navy?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I entered the Imperial Navy in 1933, Showa 8, at the Yokosuka, I became, I went into the Yokosuka Kaihei-dan, the naval unit. The reason was that Japan was in a depression and it became very difficult economically so that I was not able to pay for schooling expenses to become a teacher. Luckily I was healthy in body so I decided to become a warrior.

BC: When did you begin your training as a naval aviator and what were the circumstances of that training?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I started training as a naval aviator in Showa 10, 1935. At that time, the navy pilot standards were extremely high and the training was very rigorous. The period of initial training was eight months.

BC: I'd like to know where you conducted your flight training and what type of airplanes did you fly in those early days?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I underwent my training at the Kasumigaura Naval Aviator Training Center. There were several types of beginner aircraft that we used for takeoff and landing and for training and we used several types of trainers, [*Type 3 primary trainer*] to begin with. Then in the intermediate stage of training, we trained on a Type 93. And then when we were full-fledged aviators, we flew the Type 90 fighter. Then I joined the ranks at Kasumigaura.

BC: When you finished your training and became a regular pilot, how long before you were assigned to duty on an aircraft carrier? And which ship?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: When I finished my training in Showa 11, 1936, when I graduated from flight school, I did further fighter pilot training for about one year, not at Kasumigaura, but at Saiki, in the Saiki [*Flying Group*]. I logged about 300 hours there. But at that time, the Japanese military forces were making incursions into the Chinese mainland and so in Showa 12, 1937, I was sent to Shanghai and was flying a Type 95 [*fighter*] there. Then Nanking [*fell*] and—just double-checking. (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Interpreter just differentiating between the singular and the plural of the noun. We then mistakenly bombed the USS *Panay* gunboat and as a result we were sent back. We were sent back to Japan.

BC: Was he directly involved in the *Panay* incident?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I, of course, was not the commander, but I was a member of the group that went on that bombing raid.

BC: Now was he flying a bomber or a fighter plane at that time?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I was flying a fighter.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I flew a type 95 with two sixty-kilogram bombs.

BC: Ah.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And because this was, this became...

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Because this became an international incident, we were punished. We had attacked the gunboat of a third nation and that's why the punishment came down and we were sent back.

BC: And where did you go when you returned [to] Japan?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: We were transferred back to Omura [*Naval Flying Group*] in Japan—and I heard that [*our government paid*] a large amount of money as compensation to the United States.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And at that time, after the Nanking invasion, there were many Chinese [*runaway troops*] escaping from Nanking in boats. And the USS *Panay*, the gunboat from the USA, was mixed in with the boats carrying those [*runaway troops*] and that's why we didn't know that it was in there.

BC: Could you talk about your experience from the time you became a carrier pilot, when you started flying from aircraft carriers and your preparation and training for the Pearl Harbor attack?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: So as I just mentioned, I was transferred to the Omura [*Flying Group*] and [*six months later I moved to Saiki Flying Group to work as an instructor*] there. [Then I was successively transferred to Tsukuba and Oita Flying

Groups, where I continued instructing.] And it was then first in September of 1941, Showa 16, that I was assigned to the carrier *Soryu* and served on the *Soryu* until 1942.

BC: During the time, had you learned to fly the type Zero fighter when you were at Omura?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: No, at that time, the Zero model was not [yet] operational and we were—and it was not being used at Omura. We were training on the type 96 aircraft, fighter aircraft. [*Note: Mr. Harada states that the Zero fighter first became operational in China in the summer of 1940.*]

BC: So was the type 96 the equipment for the *Soryu* at that time?

[*Note: Mr. Harada states. What does “at that time” mean here? I am afraid my explanation was rather misunderstood by the interpreter. Anyway, I flew the Zero for the first time on the Soryu in September 1941.*]

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Yes, I think most probably yes. On the *Soryu*, it was that fighter being used, I think.

BC: I would like you to describe when you first learned about the plan for the attack on Hawaii and the special training that you undertook to prepare for the attack.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: (Speaking in Japanese) We heard that we were going to be deployed to the seas and skies near to America. And at that time, in September '41, we knew that we would be doing difficult work there. But at that time, the idea that we would go to war, we were not thinking very deeply about that sort of thing. Our training was fighter training, so we did regular fighter training. Then perhaps [*in late November*] 1941, we were deployed to the island of Etorofu, Iturup, near north of, just north of Hokkaido, to Hitokappu Bay and it was at that time, around that time, that we learned that we would be in an attack on the American base at Pearl Harbor.

BC: What did you think? How did you feel about that?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: At that time, I was not thinking about war. We were not thinking very deeply about the possibility of going to war. The diplomatic negotiations were ongoing at that time and so our mindset was that the negotiations would be successful and that we would be sent back. So the idea that we would be at war was not in our minds. We were concentrating as fighter pilots on doing our job as fighter pilots and we were not really thinking about the conflict.

BC: Had you been re-equipped with the Zero fighter by that time?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Oh yes. When I was deployed to the *Soryu* in September of 1941, at that time, when we went on the *Soryu*, all aircraft were the Zero, Mitsubishi Zero-sen type craft and we mastered those. We set about mastering those fighters.

BC: By the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, how many hours of training did you have flying the Zero?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Yes. Now, I've really never thought of the number of hours logged in the Zero itself. But at the time of that attack, if memory serves, I'd say from the first time, from the time I started flying, perhaps I had logged some 700 or 800 hours, something of that nature.

(Conversation off-mike)

END OF TAPE #1

TAPE #2

BC: We would both like to know what was the feeling and the spirit of your squadron as you were traveling to Pearl Harbor? For the attack.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I was raised in the atmosphere of the military state, militarism within my country. And therefore, even if we had had a feeling of world peace or desire feeling for world peace, there was conflict between country and country and we were following instructions. If our country told us, when our country told us to fight, then it was our duty to fight and fight to the utmost of our abilities.

BC: I would like to just follow up on that same idea and try to get some understanding of the feeling among his squadron mates, about their skill level, about their confidence. Did they feel they were going to succeed? And also if you would talk a little bit about your specific mission. What was

your task and what was the task of your carrier? And then I would also like to find out about the composition of the air group.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: On the aircraft carrier, the pilots were chiefly veterans. We had a feeling that the pilots were excellent pilots, that they had had a lot of experience in operating the aircraft, in reconnaissance and so forth. And I might even venture to say that we were proud of our abilities.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Further, we had a very strong sense of corps, a very strong sense of being warriors, fearing nothing, and if it was for our country, we would gladly die at any time.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: But our adversary was America, the huge superpower America, or the great power America. So we did have some doubts as to whether we could be successful against America, at our level, even at our level, whether we could go to war and win, there was some doubt.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Moreover, we were fighting against England, China, other countries of the world. To be at war with those countries, whether we could prevail, that was a very difficult issue. And so when I went into combat, I always thought that perhaps this time my life will be ended, my life will be over with this battle.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: So my role was not to join in the attack on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, but to protect the fleet. And so I was assigned to top cover, where I was to fly high and guard the fleet. And of course, acting as guard for the fleet is a

very difficult responsibility, very difficult job. I must confess to a little dissatisfaction at having been assigned to guarding rather than attacking. But whereas an attack of course is important, I came to realize that if the American air forces came after us, that my role as protector was also extremely important and that I would do it to the best of my ability, therefore I did not participate in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: But my buddies, my friends, the attack squadron, the attack groups, I felt that they would be very effective, that they were very capable and that they would discharge their responsibility and I had full confidence in them.

BC: What was the composition and mission of the aircraft on board the *Soryu*? How many aircraft were involved in top cover? How many in attack?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I was a [*petty*] officer [NAP 1/c] at that time and so I was not privy to that type of information and I'm not aware of it.

BC: Could you describe what you actually did? When did you take off? How many airplanes in your flight? How long did you stay in the air over the fleet? When did you return? Did you fly one mission, two missions?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Because the role of the top cover group is the protection of the fleet, we are among the first to take off and of course the fighter plane is one of the planes that has the least range of any plane. And we, [*though*] I was [*a petty*] officer at the time, I was the leader of the top cover group of three planes. So I took off with my two wingmen. And we stayed aloft flying top cover for some two hours at a time and then came back and landed on the carrier and took turns. So we did about two turns per day in rotation with others.

BC: So he made two flights?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: That is correct.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Because we were coordinated in order, along with the attack group, therefore we would go up. And then during the time that we were aloft, flying top cover, the first [*and the second*] attack wave[s] went off, then we would return to the carrier and then there was perhaps a one-hour period of preparation and then the cycle would repeat itself.

Bill Scullion (BS): What particular threat was he anticipating or had they discussed about seeing from the American base at Pearl Harbor?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: We had, of course, studied the American naval planes, the types of American naval planes that we were expected to be up against and so I too felt that if it came to an air battle, that I would need to be ready. And if it was the [*SBD*] Dauntless that came up, then we felt that we were superior and that we would not have too much trouble with the Dauntless. But that if the F4F Wildcat came after us, that we would have a much more difficult time and so we were ready to fight.

BC: What was the tail marking of your airplane? Do you recall the tail number?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Our group of, on the *Soryu*, had the E, Echo-1, something-something. Just a moment, just a minute.

KH: B, B.

I: Correction. Correction. It was Bravo-1. It was Bravo-1. Yeah.

BC: Blue color, B.

KH: B-1.

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: But I don't recall the other two letters. It was B-1, something, something. I'm sorry. Don't recall now.

BS: The aircraft you mentioned that you were expecting to see, was that an aircraft carrier aircraft that you were expecting, or were you expecting to see a flying boat from Pearl Harbor as well possibly?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: I wasn't thinking as far as what type of plane might come, what particular model might come. I was expecting land-based planes to come after us and I certainly wasn't expecting large planes. I was thinking medium to small would be coming up after us.

BC: Could you briefly describe your aviation career after the Pearl Harbor attack, what other activities, what other battles were you involved in and are you credited with destroying any Allied planes?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: Maybe we can switch interpreters now, I think? When you're ready. I'm so sorry.

I was credited with nineteen kills including the joint kills.

BS: (Inaudible)

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: My records show that I had nineteen total kills, including the joint kills.

BC: Could you speak briefly about the different battles that you were involved in?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: On the way back from Hawaii, I participated in the battle of Wake Island.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And then to the south, in the Santa Cruz battle. And then in the attack on the Australian port of Darwin.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And when the southern battles were over, I was sent over to the Indian Ocean. And on April 5, 1942, over Ceylon, we heard that there were a large number of attacking Hawker Hurricanes at the airfield, out of the airfield at Colombo, Ceylon, and so we went to attack them.

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And at that time, in one day, we—(speaking in Japanese).

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: And correcting the, confirming the difference between singular and plural, which is not in the verb until we ask—I was credited with five kills that day.

BC: All Hurricanes?

I: (Speaking in Japanese)

KH: (Speaking in Japanese)

I: So the five included Hawker Hurricanes and there was another fighter. It was not a Supermarine Spitfire. It was another type of fighter, but I don't remember the name.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

I: Okay. Mr. Harada can help you anything you need to know in terms...

END OF INTERVIEW